

# **'THAT IT WILL BE BETTER' THE STORY OF KAMENICA**

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction	1
Methodology	4
A Tradition of Autonomy	6
A Community Interrupted	7
Beginning Anew	9
An Authentic Civil Society	10
A Culture of Participation	12
'Five Fingers of a Single Hand'	15
For a Better Tomorrow	17

### Appendices:

- I. Community Member Interview
- II. Community Leader Interview
- III. NGO Staff Interview

The following is written by Laurie Ball, Hart Fellow and Research and Policy Manager at Mozaik Community Development Foundation. Laurie can be reached via email at [laurie@mozaik.ba](mailto:laurie@mozaik.ba) or by telephone at +387 033 265 290.

## Introduction

It is almost possible to visit the village of Kamenica without realizing the devastating impact that the 1992-1995 war had on the community. The village, though once completely destroyed, has been mostly rebuilt. Many houses are noteworthy in their very completeness. Rebuilt through a combination of international assistance, personal contributions and villagers' labor, Kamenica is striking in its apparent wholeness.

Upon closer examination, it is clear that some ruins remain—such as the twisted mass of concrete and sticks where once a family made its home. The white minaret extends not from a mosque but from the beginnings of mosque. This construction project, a combination of private labor and local voluntary participation, takes place across the street from the ruins of the pre-war mosque and graveyard, now a stark reminder of the havoc war wrought on this community.

Though Kamenica is a community that is very much alive, with significant Serb and Bosniak returnee populations and a range of age and economic demographics,<sup>1</sup> the specters of war linger on the hilltops and along the main road into and out of the village. The majority of the uninhabited and still destroyed houses belong to Croats, who have not yet returned to Kamenica in significant numbers. The fifteen kilometer stretch of road between Kamenica and the city of Teslić is marked by villages that remain uninhabited shadows of their former selves.

Kamenica is located in the Republic of Srpska, in the municipality of Teslić, though it is relatively easily accessible via the nearby cities of Tešanj and Maglaj in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The village itself consists of seven 'hamlets'—three Bosniak, two Serb and two Croat. The prewar population of the entire village was just over 2,000 inhabitants, current estimates place the population at approximately 1,300. There are approximately 300 households in Kamenica now: 270 Bosniak, 20 Serb, and 10 Croat.<sup>2</sup>

Economic stagnation remains a social problem with an undeniable impact on life in Kamenica, with unemployment hovering around 90 percent and little economic opportunity in the surrounding areas. Within the village of Kamenica, there are no non-governmental organizations but there is a Mjesna Zajednica<sup>3</sup> that includes representatives from all village hamlets. In addition, the youth organization PRAONI and the local NGO Futura Plus continue to work in the village.

The Mozaik Community Development Foundation (then called the NGO Development Foundation) worked with the local NGO Futura Plus in support of a project to rebuild the first

---

<sup>1</sup> Among interview subjects the average age was 45 years, with the oldest being 70 and the youngest 21. The average education level for women was 3.7 completed grades while for men it was 7.6 completed grades. Education levels also varied dramatically across age brackets: both men and women under 30 averaged 10 to 12 completed grades.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Savjet of Mjesna Zajednica, 04.01.2005.

<sup>3</sup> The Mjesna Zajednica—or MZ—was a structure of community organizations resembling community councils that was prevalent throughout pre-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. MZs have been reestablished in some areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post-war period.

aid center in Kamenica.<sup>4</sup> This project was completed following Mozaik's usual participatory approach to community development—including community planning meetings, volunteer workers, and other efforts to mobilize local resources (including approaching the local government for cooperation and assistance).

This paper represents only part of a wider research project conducted by the author. Kamenica is the second community in a three-community case-study that includes two other remote, returnee villages in different geographic areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This research is part of an effort by Mozaik to understand the motivations for and barriers to community engagement as well as the sources of community entrepreneurship<sup>5</sup> in Bosnia and Herzegovina. As such, the interview questions focus on citizen participation in formal community activities and organizations and informal community life.<sup>6</sup>

Community life in Kamenica is shaped most directly by the activities of the Mjesna Zajednica, and most specifically of the Mjesna Zajednica's ten-person executive board (hereafter referred to by its local language title of 'Savjet'). The aspects of community participation that I focused on in Kamenica were consequently participation in activities organized by the Mjesna Zajednica, knowledge of the Mjesna Zajednica's work in the past year, attendance at community meetings of any sort (including Mjesna Zajednica, first-aid center planning, and school parents' meetings), contact with external NGOs and government officials, and the nature and frequency of informal productive action among citizens.

I began this research with the hypothesis that individuals' sense of ability and feelings of inclusion in community activities would be the primary factors influencing their motivation to participate in such activities. I expected the two most frequent answers to the question 'Why did you not participate in X project?' to be variations on, 'Because no one asked me,' and 'Because I have nothing to offer.'

Due in part to the results of the first community case study in this research, a parallel question became, 'Why do some communities have many activities in which to participate while others lack such activities?' In the case of Kamenica, the abundance of activity within the community seems to be a result of the effectiveness of the Mjesna Zajednica in planning such activities. In turn, the Mjesna Zajednica's effectiveness seems to be derived from its practice of local democracy and representation, strong individual leadership, good relations with the local municipal government, and a track record of success in attracting donations to the village and completing projects that benefit the community at-large.

An additional aspect of my earlier hypothesis was the idea that gender and trauma would be key variables affecting a given individual's sense of ability and inclusion in community activities. In the case of Kamenica, gender is a clear influencing factor regarding one's perceived ability to

---

<sup>4</sup> While Mozaik is a local organization in the sense that it is an indigenous organization to Bosnia and Herzegovina, throughout the course of this work local NGOs or local partners will refer to community based NGOs throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina that are recipients of Mozaik grants.

<sup>5</sup> Community entrepreneurship here refers to a sense of partial autonomy and start-up ability within communities with respect to community-based projects.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendices I-III.

change life in the community. Women are, across the board, far more likely to answer that they do not know if they can do anything to improve their own lives and those of their neighbors. Interestingly, women in Kamenica have been included in physical labor since the return but have not been widely included in planning or 'idea' phases of activities. One important aspect to consider when examining the role of gender in Kamenica is familial responsibilities: due to young marriage ages and a small average fertility interval, women in Kamenica have little time to spare for collective efforts.

The second factor, trauma endured, appears to have only a minimal effect on participation or sense of adequacy. Many individuals who endured severe trauma during the war, including those who endured the common experience of internment, were among the most active community members in Kamenica. In addition, while scales of trauma beyond a certain level of severity are difficult to measure, it seems that both the first community in this study, Tegare, and Kamenica endured severe trauma during the war. Both participation rates and the level of community entrepreneurship in Kamenica are markedly higher than those observed and recorded in Tegare.

Another factor that I expected to influence community participation is not an individual factor but rather a collective one: a strong sense of community identity, I hypothesized, would create a tradition and expectation of involvement in community activities. Kamenica, in part due to its relative geographic isolation, has a pre-war tradition of at least partial autonomy that has continued to shape life in the post-war period.

Another aspect of this research focuses on how development organizations and Mozaik in particular can better facilitate widespread community participation in community-based projects. Part of the answer to this question is a derivation of the first: if organizations better understand the motivations for and barriers to individual participation in community activities, then they can better design their efforts to include new participants. I also expected to see a certain level of feedback between the programmatic and individual aspects of community engagement such that successful previous projects would lead to an increased willingness on the part of citizens to participate in future collective efforts.

Individual leadership was another factor that I hypothesized might play a significant role in motivating citizen participation. In the case of Kamenica this proved to be a somewhat important factor in attracting citizens to participate in planned activities. While the individuals directing the Mjesna Zajednica have proven themselves to be effective and honest leaders over the last five years, they have also benefited from the institution within which they work. More so than any individual leader, the Mjesna Zajednica as an institution is trusted in Kamenica.

However, individual leadership has an important impact on one key aspect of community entrepreneurship: creating a starting point for future collective efforts. Without programs in which to participate, the willingness to do so means little. In Kamenica, individual leadership has helped to create such initiatives in part due to the time and financial sacrifices made by community leaders. Despite the high rate of unemployment, some families within Kamenica receive financial support from relatives living abroad, and many of these families tend to contribute financially to community efforts. It is important to emphasize that despite this there are no families in Kamenica who enjoy the promise of economic security in the short or long

term and every person interviewed indicated that it was a struggle to provide for his or her family's needs over the course of the last year.

The rest of this work focuses on the 'story of Kamenica' and will be an ethnographic sketch of community life, with a consideration of what this story might imply for Kamenica's future. I will return to this data, and to the questions of participation, engagement and entrepreneurship explored above, in a comprehensive piece written after the conclusion of all three case studies.

## **Methodology**

The research period in Kamenica included four weeks of living with a family in the community from Sunday through Wednesday of each week. During that time, I conducted one focus group, 26 formal interviews with residents of Kamenica (all but two of them audio recorded) and numerous informal interviews.

The first week included a focus group with community women after a school parents' meeting entitled, 'Give me a Tour of Your Community.' Together, we drew a map of their community and spoke briefly about life there. This session included only women as a way to gain entry into community life and introduce myself. If the session had been mixed by gender, it was my suspicion that the women would defer to the men present.

Over the course of the remaining three weeks in Kamenica, I conducted one-on-one interviews with community members, largely through a snowball sample selection process.<sup>7</sup> I made every effort to have equal representation of men and women and young and elderly people, as well as representation from different ethnic groups and geographic diversity in terms of the precise location of an individual's house within Kamenica. While the end results were not ideal, they are somewhat representative. Men are over-represented in the study, but they are also over-represented within the sphere of public life in Kamenica.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, I conducted interviews with people from outside of Kamenica who have worked there: one staff member from Mozaik and two employees of the local Futura Plus.

Names used in the body of this work are fictional to protect the confidentiality of interview subjects, and any similarities to actual names of Kamenica residents are accidental. I did attempt to match fictional names with the actual ethnicity of interview subjects, such that Serbs tend to have typically Serb names, etc. Individual community leaders are specifically referenced by name in segments relating directly to their roles as leaders.

---

<sup>7</sup> A snowball sample indicates that I interviewed everyone that I knew who was willing to be interviewed and asked those individuals for suggestions of who else I might interview. Toward the end of the research, I was able to cater these questions to target groups I knew were underrepresented in my study.

<sup>8</sup> Formal interview subjects included ten women and sixteen men from Kamenica.

## A Tradition of Autonomy

*'People lived beautifully, there was money. We built the roads through the Mjesna Zajednica. Before the war, there was a plan but then the war came and...that was all before.'*

- Ahmed

Despite the fact that there was never a reliable water supply or a high standard of living in Kamenica, before the war, community members lived in a decent degree of comfort and the majority of men were employed. The region of Northwestern Bosnia and Herzegovina where Kamenica is located never enjoyed major economic success, but before the war most men found work in the other former Yugoslav republics, with the majority working in various cities in Croatia. Many men also worked abroad in Germany or any number of other places in Europe and beyond.

With the men returning to Kamenica only on weekends, women labored in their homes and fields, and, according to Muhammed, 'that way it was good for us.' Given the relatively high pre-war employment rate, the community of Kamenica was able to come together to meet most of its collective needs without external assistance.

'Those of us who had success, those of us who worked, gave money and everything. That's how the society was,' recalled Emir.

Many people look back on days of the former Yugoslavia and the government of Marshall Tito with a sense of nostalgia for and idealization of the time when community residents could afford to contribute to collective efforts in order to improve life in Kamenica. Said one man, 'When Tito was in government, everything was better. We had work and pay. Now all these young people around here, they want to work but can't.'

While this longing for Tito's Yugoslavia is typical in Kamenica and across much of Bosnia and Herzegovina, some of the more elderly members of Kamenica's community have a different memory of communist days. 'After World War II,' said Emir, 'you had to declare if you were Serb or Croat, there was no place for Muslims. With Tito, Croats and Serbs were 100 percent better off.'

Though World War II did have a minimal local impact on Kamenica and its surrounding area, elderly members of the community also remember that WWII caused only a brief interruption in life. Following WWII, formal schooling appeared in Kamenica for the first time. In the immediate post-war period, older children learned to read and write in informal local classes, and the local school was built around 1957. At approximately the same time, agricultural life in Kamenica was transformed by the arrival of farm machines.

Beginning, it seems, with the post-World War II period, there was a sense of autonomy within Kamenica and that autonomy soon became associated with the collective identity of villagers. In the last fifty years, Kamenica has grown from approximately 50 households to 1,080 households before the last war. Approximately thirty years ago, local citizens, following this autonomous tradition, came together to build their own water system. Due to the expanding size of the

community, this water system was unable to supply sufficient water for all households on a consistent basis even before the 1992-1995 war.

The pre-war Mjesna Zajednica Savjet was between 18 and 24 people, approximately twice the size of the current Mjesna Zajednica Savjet, and it usually met two times per month. In addition to helping with social problems within the village, the Mjesna Zajednica worked on infrastructural projects with the financial support of village collections. 'We took care of ourselves. We bought things for ourselves between ourselves. Whatever was necessary, how much money for building materials—that kind of thing we had to buy and work. That's how we were, there were no donations before the war.' (Muhammed) Despite this emphasis on a sense of autonomy, Savjet members and other citizens (including many of today's community leaders) were often involved with the former Yugoslav government at various levels.

In general, Kamenica's residents recall the pre 1992-1995 war days with fondness and nostalgia—though such talk does not dominate the conversational landscape in Kamenica today. Like so many other places in Bosnia and Herzegovina, pre-war Kamenica was a community marked by interethnic harmony. While many people who now serve as community leaders in Kamenica were previously involved with the former-Yugoslav government at various levels, there was always a sense of at least partial autonomy in Kamenica. Before the war, though always majority Bosniak, Kamenica also had significant Serb and Croat communities. Though geographically separated, villagers today recall that the three once enjoyed close relationships: 'We lived together, Serbs had theirs, Croats had theirs, like that we would always visit each other for coffee, when it was Christmas we would go to their places, when it was Bajram they would come to ours.'

### **A Community Interrupted**

*'I can't describe or tell how it was.'*

-Šaha

When the war began in the region surrounding Kamenica, many men from Kamenica joined with the Croats in the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina to fight against the Serb armies in the nearby areas. '(In Teslić) there was a (front) line,' recalled Muhammed. 'There the Serbs came, that's where the line was drawn and therefore the Croats and ours were on one side, together on the front line. We were like that for four months here... There in Teslić there was line and there our men were on the line with the Croats and their commander.'

People left Kamenica during the war under various circumstances, with many men joining the BH Army as Muhammed recalled. Most citizens, including the women and children, left Kamenica following the instructions on the local army commander with a small bag and the clothes on their back, heading for the nearby city of Žepče and later on to Zenica.

'(When we left) we were first in Žepče, (then) we were in Zenica five and a half months. My husband was far away at the front line. I was alone for ten months; my children were small. We

were like this (she gestured to the clothes on her back), only with a bag, nothing else,' remembered Šaha.

One young adult woman, Alma, recalled leaving Kamenica, 'First, we went up into the hills for a while, but some women stayed behind to take care of the soldiers. Then we came back, only to leave again. We packed some things but left almost everything in the house. I remember that my mother locked the door.' Alma and her family also went first to Žepče, and later on to Zenica. She talked about how her relatives in a different region of the country endured a trauma far worse than hers during the war saying, 'You hear their stories and you just sit there and cry. Thank God that didn't happen here.'

However grateful Alma may have been to escape the fates of so many others that she saw as worse than her own, the trauma endured by many and perhaps even most people from Kamenica was very real. While in or near Žepče, many were interned in camps run by Croat forces in addition to enduring the more common difficulties of war—including displacement and hunger. Though the experiences endured by the women and children who were interned in camps near Žepče are only rarely spoken about, one woman shared her memories, drifting between the past and present tenses as many others do when speaking about similarly difficult experiences:

'I was in a camp for 25 days. Serbs drove us away from here and there we were in a village called Ziminca and Croats forced us into a refrigerated trailer-truck. There isn't air, but we escaped and they followed us as far as they could. And then they came during the night to rape. One night seven men raped one woman!'

Many of the men who were fighting in the BH Army later endured a similar fate near Mostar when the previously allied Croat and Bosniak BH Army split along ethnic lines. In a typical response to the question, 'Where were you during the war?' Adnan responded, 'I was in a camp near Mostar for 30 and some days. I have a certificate from the Red Cross.'

Many of the men from Kamenica were in camps near Mostar for time periods ranging from 15 days to one year. Many were found by the Red Cross and given certificates to verify that were interned in camps and, in many cases, to ease their search for refuge in foreign countries.

While citizens of Kamenica were scattered across Bosnia and Herzegovina and the world during the war, the village itself was destroyed. Elmir, who was at the time fighting with the BH Army, recalled watching the mosque in Kamenica destroyed from his vantage point a distance away in the mountains. 'Everything here was destroyed—Serb, Croat and Bosniak. Who did it? We don't know.'

### **Beginning Anew**

*'I could not wait for us to return to our own (place).'*

-Emina

Despite the challenges of community organizing during war time—heightened by the fact that the community of Kamenica was both displaced and dispersed, the Mjesna Zajednica continued



to function during the war. Soon after the war ended, its members and other residents of Kamenica began thinking about returning to their village.

'We began (thinking about returning) in 1996 or so, searching (for help) so that we might return—if we could talk about it with everyone in the municipality of Teslić, with SFOR, with all international organizations...'

The time period during which people from Kamenica began contemplating and working toward their return was also a period of transition and change for the Mjesna Zajednica. The pre-war president of the Mjesna Zajednica began the return efforts, 'I went looking (for help) without the others. I didn't have any kind of delegation. I found organizations—Hilfswerk and the Swedish organization...Then to the group (of people from Kamenica), I said let's form a delegation so that we can go to look for organizations...'

One of the newer members to this post-war group of organizers (škupstina) also recalled these early efforts, his first as a community leader. 'The Škupstina Mjesna Zajednica put together a list of people who wanted to return—some young people stayed in America, others came back from Germany. People from IFOR did not believe that people wanted to return (here). Already in April 1999, people did not want to wait any longer...We built two houses so that people would see—so that they would see people here.'

People returned to Kamenica at first in a large group in two buses and 35 cars, according to Ahmed. However, after that initial return to see the village, families returned in groups of 10 or 12 when they had found donations to help them rebuild their homes. This return and reconstruction process was actually eased by the large size of typical families in Kamenica and the fact that many people in Kamenica are in fact at least distantly related to one another. Said one man who lives in Kamenica but is not originally from there, '(Here) it is different. When you look around we come to the conclusion that everyone here is kin, they are bound by blood.'

Extended family members often worked together to rebuild their homes with donated materials from a variety of organizations. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) was the major donor supporting reconstruction in Kamenica, but others including the Republika Srpska government, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina government, the American Refugee Committee, Austrian Hilfswerk, and the municipality of Teslić all contributed to home reconstruction efforts in Kamenica. In addition, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) completed a major infrastructure project to restore the village's electricity.

Though two houses built by the Republika Srpska were not built by villagers themselves, everyone in the village that I interviewed proudly proclaimed that they had worked on their homes themselves. Some families combined donated materials with their own financial resources in order to hire plumbers or other experts, but most people proclaimed with pride, 'We built it ourselves!' when asked who built their homes, only later adding that they did so with donated materials.

This strategy of receiving only donated materials appears to have been an effective way to rebuild Kamenica both efficiently and while simultaneously ensuring that villagers felt a sense of ownership regarding their return. The members of the Mjesna Zajednica and the leaders of the return process did not push for this structure of assistance but instead remember:

'We agreed to build the houses, it didn't matter to us how it was done. So that people would return, however they could. If they (the organizations) built the houses or if we built them ourselves (did not matter).'

However unintentional the role of villagers in reconstructing their own homes may have been, this process of return and reconstruction built upon the history of at least partial autonomy in the village and began re-establishing a local culture in which citizens are expected to participate in activities to rebuild and improve life in Kamenica.

### **An Authentic Civil Society**

*'There is always the Mjesna Zajednica.'*

-Amir

In addition to leading and organizing the return to Kamenica, the Mjesna Zajednica has served as the key institution to bridge 'the space between individuals and the state'<sup>9</sup> In part, the Mjesna Zajednica has been effective through its guarantee of democracy and representation at the local level. Through Savjet elections, citizens have the power to influence who will serve as their local leaders. In addition, though citizens are quick to point out that there are no inter-ethnic problems in Kamenica, they are also very quick to mention the fact that there is a Serb representative on the Mjesna Zajednica Savjet (Alma and others). Before the war, the Savjet was also established with such representation of nationalities largely because the members of different ethnicities always lived in separate geographic pockets of the village. Most people interviewed expressed pride and confidence in the Savjet's functioning and especially in its system of representation.

Perhaps more important for citizens of Kamenica is the fact that the Mjesna Zajednica has an established record of delivering benefits to the community through attracting donations and organizing projects. In addition, says the current Mjesna Zajednica president, 'We had succeeded in working on something that is good for people, that is good for returnees. But I pushed forward the work, I have financed from the beginning seventy percent of all activities, everything that was needed, I financed.'

In part due to the central role of the Mjesna Zajednica, citizens tended to believe that the Mjesna Zajednica was the institution most likely to solve problems confronting all of Kamenica. Izmir's answer to the question, 'Who would solve a problem confronting the entire community?' was typical: 'The Mjesna Zajednica. They would solve that kind of problem, they would look for help. We are together.'

---

<sup>9</sup> "Civil Society, Democratization, and Development: Clearing the Analytical Ground," in *Democratization*, 1:3, (autumn 1994) as cited in USAID/BiH Civil Society: Final Report 2004.

Despite the fact that citizens almost uniformly cited the Mjesna Zajednica as a place to go for help or as the institution most likely to solve a community problem, no one that I interviewed could recall approaching the Mjesna Zajednica with a problem. One young person in Kamenica who has organized an after-school program for local children called Eco-Kids does, however, recall attending Mjesna Zajednica meetings when issues concerning the program were at stake and in this way receiving help from it.

This relationship between individuals in Kamenica with a desire to start a new program or activity and the Mjesna Zajednica is not uncommon. Said one member of the Mjesna Zajednica Savjet, 'When people have an application, the Savjet will sign it. In general, residents know (about the Mjesna Zajednica).'

The Mjesna Zajednica has been able to pair its close relationships with citizens with a productive relationship with the local government and non-governmental organizations. The president of the Mjesna Zajednica meets with the mayor or other municipal officials approximately three times a week and says, 'We have not had any problems...the Serb government in Teslić has always been correct with us.'

The local NGO Futura Plus (based in Teslić) has also had a long-standing relationship with the Mjesna Zajednica, having worked with Kamenica through the Mjesna Zajednica since the early days of the return. Currently, Futura Plus is working on its seventh project in Kamenica—a greenhouse project with seven women. It is clear from the way that Futura Plus employees speak about Kamenica as a village that they respect its citizens and enjoy working there. Said one employee, '(Kamenica) is different from other places because they are the happiest. It is difference because they are able to unleash happy cooperation, they are ready to work.'

According to Futura Plus workers, they usually choose to work through the Mjesna Zajednica because it has proven to be such a cooperative and effective partner, but a few projects have also directly incorporated other people and organizations. Futura Plus worked with a local youth leader to support the Eco-Kids project as well as with local women through a greenhouse project, though the organization began that project through the Mjesna Zajednica. Says one person who has worked in Kamenica for many years, 'The women are not involved in the decision-making processes. I can only get to them through the men, they tell me who I can speak to.'

The Mjesna Zajednica has been effective as a clearing house for local projects and has, in most cases, been able to mobilize broad participation in community projects. For example, in a 2004 project funded by Mozaik, the Mjesna Zajednica was able to recruit 22 volunteers to construct the first-aid center. While the participatory approach employed by Futura Plus and Mozaik for this first-aid center was not different from the structure of previous projects in Kamenica, a few participants did remember that the planning meetings included more citizens than were usually present at such meetings for other projects.

According to Elmir, the first-aid center was also the first time that the residents of the Serb hamlet of Mijići worked with the residents of the three Bosniak hamlets in order to complete a specific project. He added that there were no problems between Serbs and Bosniaks before,

during or after the project and that he feels citizens could work together again across ethnic lines on a project to improve the local roads.

Perhaps most importantly, the Mjesna Zajednica serves as an advocate for community interests in Kamenica to Futura Plus, international organizations, and the local government. It is clear that the staff of Futura Plus trusts and respects the Mjesna Zajednica and its leadership in this advocacy role. Indicatively, when asked what the greatest needs in Kamenica were, Futura Plus' president responded, 'Ask them!' (Though he did then go on to list some basic needs, which matched those identified by community leaders and citizens alike.)

In this sense, it is clear that the relationship between Futura Plus and the Mjesna Zajednica is highly productive both because of the long-standing commitment on the part of Futura Plus to the community, the Mjesna Zajednica's strengths as discussed in the previous chapter, and the mutually trusting relationship between the two organizations. Said one employee of Futura Plus, 'We do not work only to help those who cannot help themselves at all, we work (in Kamenica) because people can help themselves some. Futura Plus has been present since before the authorities visited and before they reconstructed the first house in Kamenica...Now many organizations are appearing but they were not here before when there were more problems...(In Kamenica) they still do not have all the information about who could help them. Futura Plus is the link.'

### **A Culture of Participation**

*Question: Why do you work with others on activities here?*

*Answer: Because we need (things)...No one can work if we will not. Everyone does it for ourselves.'*

*-Kenan*

Talking about community life and activities in Kamenica is one of the most rapid ways to elicit excited responses. One seventy-year old man, Emir, who continues to work to fix up the road near his home, became animated talking about all the activities that he has worked on since returning to Kamenica. 'It cannot be any other way! If we need a mosque, a school, water, roads—we worked on it ourselves,' he said.

Post-war Kamenica has built upon its pre-war sense of autonomy in order to continue to benefit from high levels of community engagement and a tradition, and indeed expectation, of community involvement. Multiple people interviewed enthusiastically proclaimed that 'People from Kamenica want to work!' as Šaha, a nearly seventy-year old woman, did. She went on to say, 'Little by little it will be better, if God gives.'

Community leaders in Kamenica across the board said that it is not difficult to get citizens to be involved with community projects in Kamenica. Said one member of the Mjesna Zajednica Savjet, 'It is not hard (to get others to work). There are no problems, we work at the level of the Mjesna Zajednica and everyone works, everyone together.'

In addition to drawing on the tradition of autonomy in Kamenica, leaders are able to draw upon a sense of identity within the community. Many people, like Šaha, associate that identity with people's willingness and desire to work. Others, however, have an even more specific identity in mind when they think about Kamenica.

'Kamenica was second in BiH (as a returnee village)...But the majority of the people from (the first returnee village) were abroad, we were all assembled together,' recalled the former Mjesna Zajednica president with great pride.

The current Mjesna Zajednica president mirrored his predecessor's pride in Kamenica and his association of the village with being first: 'We are united when we need something. We can be one against another, but when we need to be all united, we are not against anyone. We have this mentality that brings us together, which involves everyone, which unites all of us, that's why I think we are different from others. We are always first, we have initiative, we have suggestions. We always have something new that can be started...'

One aspect of community life already examined that contributes to the sense of cohesion in Kamenica is the fact that many community members are at least distant relatives. Neighbors, whether directly related or not, tend to work together in the fields though it is known who owns which land and crops. Some of this cohesion may be tied directly to the sense of autonomy in Kamenica; over the years, people have learned to rely on one another to get by. When asked if he can do anything to make life better in his community, Samir replied, 'Me, myself, I cannot. With the help of others, certainly I could.'

Another person in Kamenica, a 24 year-old unofficial community leader, has launched an after school program for children called Eco-Kids. The program was his own idea, launched in October 2003, and was in part motivated by his belief that others would not help Kamenica if he did not. 'No one was taking charge of organizing people in Kamenica so that they would work on something. That's what we did, in our section'

The program is managed and led by volunteers who work with the children after school doing weekly workshops about ecology and working on posters and placards, going on excursions, and working to clean up the yard of the school and the river. The group has worked with Futura Plus and the Mjesna Zajednica to obtain funding, and its leader has taught himself about ecology over the internet. 'We have big ideas—let's say many more projects—like building an Eco-Base...'

Finding additional funding is likely the most significant challenge facing Eko-Kids in the near future, but its leader is set on finding the resources to continue the work. It is clear that he loves Kamenica, the place where he plans to always live, and his work with Eko-Kids. When asked if he could do anything to make life better in Kamenica he said, 'I don't know.' He paused for a long time with a half-smile on his face and said slowly, 'I think that we are doing that. Eko-Kids is something that up to now has been working on that.'

This young leader has decided to dedicate his time to Eko-Kids rather than participating in other projects, although he was involved for a short time with both the first-aid center project and PRAONI, the youth organization that works in Kamenica. When asked why he stopped working

on those initiatives, he said, 'There are enough people here who don't have anything to do. Eko-Kids is my priority.'

This comment calls attention to the fact that despite its clearly detrimental economic impact, the high levels of unemployment have, when paired with Kamenica's sense of autonomy and identity, made it easier for community leaders to recruit volunteers for activities in the community. Many community members are currently working together in order to reconstruct the mosque in Kamenica. Because this project does not benefit all members of the community (because it is a multi-ethnic community), this project is taking place outside of the direct auspices of the Mjesna Zajednica. Instead, a man who formerly served on the Savjet was elected to be the leader of the mosque reconstruction effort. Asked whether it was difficult to recruit volunteer workers, he said, 'It was not hard, naturally the people who came were those who didn't have work or weren't busy with their responsibilities during the days when these activities took place. In that way, we came to an agreement—they worked because they wanted the project to materialize.'

The majority of the members of the current Mjesna Zajednica Savjet were not pre-war members of the Savjet because they were working in other former Yugoslav republics or internationally. While some of the current members are employed, their employment responsibilities are, generally speaking, less than their pre-war commitments and much more local—in fact, most Savjet members that have formal employment work within Kamenica itself.

However, the most important impact of high unemployment in Kamenica is not this silver-lining of additional time to spend on community activities but the significant economic drain of attempting to provide for families on pensions or nothing at all. Whereas the pre-war autonomy was fueled in part by the fact that households were able to donate their own private funds to community activities, now such surplus funds are hard to come by.

'It is not possible to rebuild Kamenica without money,' said Sabrija. 'There is nowhere to work now. The Mjesna Zajednica doesn't have a budget, before the war there were enough workers in Kamenica who worked in Germany and from their work they took a bit away and gave it to the Mjesna Zajednica. Now there are not workers, without them we can only ask organizations for help.'

### **'Five Fingers of a Single Hand'**

*'There are differences between all people. You see, there are differences between five fingers, in the same way there are differences between people. Not all people are good, you know...People found themselves however they could after the war.'*

-Medin

Though there are differences within Kamenica and in some cases those affect the roles that individuals play in community life, economic, educational, and ethnic differences do not seem to cause problems within Kamenica.

With respect to ethnic differences, both before and after the war people from Kamenica claim that there were not inter-ethnic tensions within the village itself. 'We do not have any kind of problems, we have not been discriminated against,' said one man regarding the status of the majority of Kamenica's residents as Bosniak returnees in the Republika Srpska.

Perhaps most tellingly, when asked if any of her neighbors had not yet returned to Kamenica, one Serb woman replied, 'I have many neighbors who have not returned. There are Croats, Croats have the most who have not returned.' When I followed up to ask if there were any Serbs who had not returned, Barbara replied that there were not. It was particularly indicative that Barbara continues to think of Croats as her neighbors despite both the war and the fact that they are not her direct neighbors.

While Kamenica has avoided divisions or problems along ethnic lines, there are some residents of Kamenica who feel that economic and educational differences can affect community life. 'I am only really friends with two other young people; others treat me differently because I have less education,' said Alma.

She went on to say that though many pretend there are no differences between people in Kamenica she sometimes feels that others look at her differently because they think that her family has a lot of money.

It is true that some people in the village have access to more financial resources than others, however most people responded to the question 'Are there any economic differences in your community?' with statements resembling Elma's. 'I don't know,' she shrugged. 'Always someone lives better, others live weakly.' She smiled and threw her hands in the air. 'It depends!'

The economic differences tended to be acknowledged in interviews but were not usually cited as a source of problems between community members. Among members of the community who are leaders, either through the Mjesna Zajednica or informally, it seems that economics are not a key factor in that not all leaders are wealthier members of the community. However, the Mjesna Zajednica president is also the lead businessman in the village and as such may gain some of his influence and trust from that position.

While economics do not seem to keep individuals from participating in collective activities, gender is a key factor limiting such participation. Women in Kamenica rarely participate in formal community activities and are (as they are elsewhere in BiH) completely excluded from the Mjesna Zajednica.

In the focus group and in interviews women consistently said that they had never spoken with anyone from the government or any organization, and even more indicatively only rarely did women know what the Mjesna Zajednica had done in the last year. Interestingly, even women whose husbands were actively involved in the Mjesna Zajednica were unaware of its specific activities. Likewise, Barbara's response to the question, 'Can you do anything to make life better here?' was rather typical: 'I have no idea.'

While women's exclusion from the decision-making and planning processes in the village may in part be a result of tradition, it is also clear that women's responsibilities within their homes and their often large families are so consuming that they leave little time for community engagement. Though included in such physical activities, women by and large remain excluded from planning activities for future or on-going projects. Interestingly, when asked about the largest problem facing Kamenica, women were far more likely than men to cite unemployment rather than roads or water. Though most women interviewed did not express explicit dissatisfaction with their current roles in the community, many did express interest in being involved in micro-credit or other economic projects in the future, and had ideas for the shape such projects could take (including dairy and handicraft cooperatives).

Perhaps because there was no major demographic shift in Kamenica during or after the war, women never had to change their roles in the community in order to fill gaps by those who did not return. However, the reconstruction process itself was so demanding that the work of all citizens was absolutely necessary—women and children included.

Women from Kamenica were frequently separated from their husbands for at least the first years of the war, during a time when both women and men were often interned in camps. As demonstrated by one woman from Kamenica's memory of women being raped (see 'A Community Interrupted'), these experiences were often deeply traumatizing for both women and men.

Interestingly, few individuals in Kamenica discuss what occurred during the war—though many provide general details such as the length of time they spent in a camp, the part of the country that the camp was in, and the fact that they have a Red Cross certificate verifying their experiences. One woman, who was not herself in a camp, was emotional to the point of tears when talking about how much her neighbors suffered in the camps—and how strange she feels that it is that no one ever talks about what happened.

Unspoken though it may be, the suffering seems to run just below the surface. Says one man who was in a camp, and whose children and wife were also interned, 'It still is not good how it ought to be good, how it was. You cannot talk about yourself and always it's a problem if one looks around oneself and asks, 'What?' or 'What are you doing?' (It is as if) each one (has gone) to his own quarters.'

### **For a Better Tomorrow**

*'You know what? We are all optimistic that it will be better. But now, how it will be (better), that we will see in the future. But we are optimistic that it will be better, we would love it to be better. We cannot (make it better) alone, we need some organization, some donation. Everyone works on their own, in that way something will come to us so that it will be possible to work on something.'*

*-Almir*

While Kamenica clearly has a tradition of community action and partial autonomy (or community entrepreneurship), in this post-war period it is not possible for the community to



continue moving forward without additional assistance. However, people from Kamenica are not waiting idly for such assistance to arrive. As Almir's statement demonstrates, people in Kamenica are working to prepare the ground for multiple projects so that when assistance arrives, they will be in a position to move forward immediately.

Without such assistance, Kamenica's residents are incapable of solving their most daunting problems despite their willingness to work and contribute from their own modest material resources. Across the board, citizens of Kamenica cited the inadequate water supply (which is available only occasionally despite the fact that many homes are equipped with indoor plumbing) and poor roads (which are unpaved and in poor condition) as the major infrastructural problems facing their community.

In the different geographic sections of Kamenica, among people of varied economic status and across ethnic lines, people in Kamenica identified roads and water as their priorities for future projects. In addition, NGO workers from Futura Plus were quick to identify those same needs. The Mjesna Zajednica applied to USAID for funding to upgrade the water system (which community leaders estimate would cost approximately 650.000 KM), and even raised approximately half of the necessary funds (300.000 KM) through community member contributions, but they were unsuccessful in obtaining outside funding for the additional 350.000 KM that would be needed to update the water system and supply the whole village.<sup>10</sup>

In many ways, Kamenica is an example of type of productive community life that many organizations and people have hoped and worked to support or create throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina in the post-war period. In addition to community members' ability to come together for productive action, Kamenica is a place where inter-ethnic relations remain positive and separate ethnic groups still manage to live together in one community.

On the other hand, Kamenica also faces what might be the greatest challenge for communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as they advance from the post-war period into the next phase of transition and development. The unemployment rate in Kamenica remains approximately 90 percent.

Many middle-aged people said that they, despite all of their hard work to return to their village, would like to move to a foreign country. 'It is a hard situation,' said Adnan (age 40), in a rather typical description of Kamenica's economic life. 'It is not such a black picture, we live but we live weakly. We need a bit of interest (in us) and some work—we want to work. Some were in camps, people want to work but there isn't enough (work)...I would love more than anything to go to another country.'

However, all of the people under 30 that I interviewed expressed a desire to stay in Kamenica for most of their lives, often saying, 'Everything I have is here.' In many cases, this seems to be in part a result of love of place and family and in part of a result of the lack of opportunities to go to a foreign country and start over. One young woman, however, had a few chances to go to other countries but chose to stay in Kamenica. 'I love it here,' she said. 'I could never leave and be away from my family for good.'

---

<sup>10</sup> Interview with the President of the Mjesna Zajednica.

One effort to promote local economic stimulation was a recent micro-credit project through UMCOR supporting approximately 15 individuals by allowing them to purchase cows and sell the milk. According to 206, there is a local market for the milk because a company nearby has high capacity and buys quality milk from local people. However, as helpful such efforts to support subsistence economic initiatives in the village might be, ultimately Kamenica will face the same major challenge that much of Bosnia and Herzegovina must confront: the current absence of a pragmatic long-term plan for economic development in practice.

Despite the daunting nature of the challenges before them, Almir's optimism was echoed throughout the village. This optimism is frequently paired with a sense of confusion about how progress may be achieved, as Almir's opinion was echoed by Edin's:

*'I am always optimistic that it will be better. Right now, I cannot predict how it will be better. I am optimistic that it will be better and I always believe that it will be better.'*

Appendix I:  
Community Member Interview

---

*I am going to begin asking some questions about you, your family, and your home.*

1. How old are you? Where were you born?
2. Did you ever go to school?
3. Do you have a job? Have you ever had a job?
4. How many people live in this house? Who are they? (age, relation to interviewee)
5. How long have you lived in this house? Who built this house? Does this house have electricity, gas and/or water?
6. When did you move to \_\_\_\_\_? Where did you go during the war? Before the war, had you always lived in \_\_\_\_\_?
7. Why did you return to \_\_\_\_\_?
8. Do you have any family members that do not live in \_\_\_\_\_? Where do they live? How often do they visit \_\_\_\_\_?
9. How does your family make its living? How did your family make its living before the war?
10. Would you say that it has been extremely difficult/difficult/or not difficult to support your needs and the needs of your family in the past year?
11. How is the situation with your neighbors now?
12. How often do you see your neighbors? Do you think of them as friends? Do you ever help each other? Can you give me an example?
13. Before the war, how often did you see your neighbors? Did you think of them as friends? Did you help each other? Can you give me any examples?

*Now I am going to ask you some questions about life in your community. When I say your community I mean \_\_\_\_\_-- (drawing on definition of community agreed upon during the focus group exercises during Week I.)*

14. Have you ever worked with others to build a road, a school, a health center, or a water system?
15. If there were a problem that affected the entire community, for example lack of water or electricity, who do you think would work together to solve it? Who do you think would be first to start this work? Where do you think money and materials would come from?
16. Suppose someone in this community had something unfortunate happen to them, such as a death in the family or a money problem. Who do you think that they could turn to for help?
17. Where do you go when you need help? Where do you go for advice?
18. Suppose two people in this community had a fairly serious problem with each other. Who do you think would resolve that problem?

19. Do you think there are differences between the people living in \_\_\_\_\_? What are they?

*As needed, probe with the following:*

- Differences in education
- Differences in wealth/material possessions
- Differences between men and women
- Differences between younger and older generations
- Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers
- Differences in religious beliefs
- Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

20. Do you think people in this community trust each other?

21. Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?

22. What is a problem facing \_\_\_\_\_ now? Have you tried to solve it? How/Why not?

23. Do you think that you are able to do things to make this community a better place to live? What can you do?

24. What 3 words come to mind when you think about \_\_\_\_\_?

25. Does it mean anything special to live in \_\_\_\_\_?

26. Does it mean anything special to be from \_\_\_\_\_?

*I am going to begin with a few questions about you and your family.*

How old are you? Where were you born?

Did you ever go to school?

Do you have a job? Have you ever had a job?

When did you move to \_\_\_\_\_? Where did you live during the war?

Before the war, had you always lived in \_\_\_\_\_?

Why did you return to \_\_\_\_\_? Who do you live with in \_\_\_\_\_ now? Who did you live with in \_\_\_\_\_ before the war?

Do you have any family members that do not live in \_\_\_\_\_? Where do they live?

How often do they visit \_\_\_\_\_?

How does your family make its living? How did your family make its living before the war?

Would you say that it has been extremely difficult/difficult/or not difficult to support your needs and the needs of your family in the past year?

*Now I am going to ask you some questions about activities in this community.*

Do you consider yourself a main person (jedan od glavnih) in your community? How did you become a main person here?

Do others in the community see you as a main person?

Do you organize community activities? Can you tell me about the most recent one?

Do you have any activities planned for the next month? The next six months? The next year?

Who do you organize these activities with? Who participates in them? How do you spread information about activities within your community?

Have you worked with any associations (udruženja) or NGOs on any projects? Have you received funding from any associations or NGOs? Which ones and for what?

Have you approached the government for any kind of assistance? Can you tell me about how they responded to you?

Have you tried to get other community members to organize activities or help out with activities? Have you been successful? Can you tell me why?

Do you feel like you are able to change your community?

*Now I am going to ask you a few questions about \_\_\_\_\_.*

What is the biggest problem facing \_\_\_\_\_? Are you trying to do anything to solve that? Why or why not?

Do you think there are differences between the people living in \_\_\_\_\_? What are they?

*As needed, probe with the following:*

- Differences in education
- Differences in wealth/material possessions
- Differences between men and women
- Differences between younger and older generations
- Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers
- Differences in religious beliefs
- Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

Do you think people in this community trust each other?

Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?

What three words do you think of first when I say \_\_\_\_\_?

Does it mean anything special to be from \_\_\_\_\_?

*I am going to ask some questions about your organization.*

How was your organization created?

What kinds of activities has it been involved in?

What is the main purpose of your organization today? Has this changed over time?

How do you distribute information about activities?

Do you have any activities planned in \_\_\_\_\_ during the next month? Six months? Year?

Has your organization ever asked anything of the government? (How did they respond?)

Which level(s) of government have you been involved with? Has a government

official ever asked your organization to do something? (What did he/she ask of you?

How did you respond?)

*Now I am going to ask you some questions about \_\_\_\_\_.*

What is the biggest problem facing \_\_\_\_\_? Are you trying to do anything to solve that? Why or why not?

Do you think there are differences between the people living in \_\_\_\_\_? What are they?

*As needed, probe with the following:*

Differences in education

Differences in wealth/material possessions

Differences between men and women

Differences between younger and older generations

Difference between old inhabitants and new settlers

Differences in religious beliefs

Differences in ethnic background

Do these differences cause problems? Did they cause problems before the war?

Do you think people in this community trust each other?

Do you think over the last two years this level of trust here has gotten better, gotten worse or stayed the same? Is this level of trust better, worse or the same as it was before the war?

Is Kamenica different from other communities that you work in? How?

What three words do you think of first when I say \_\_\_\_\_?